

Social Media: Revolutionizing the Business World

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*Abstract*

Public communication avenues were greatly affected through the invention of the Internet; however, what has developed communication processes even further is the rise of social media. This thesis explains how the utilization of social media tools is revolutionizing the business world and also provides information to understand the direction in which social media is heading.

### Social Media: Revolutionizing the Business World

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, public communication was controlled by the media avenues of newspaper, radio and television. However, the invention of the World Wide Web in 1991 began a shift in communication that was not anticipated (Qualman 4).

Within the last ten years, the Internet has continued to revolutionize the business world – and personal lives – through the utilization of social media.

While the radio industry took 38 years to reach 50 million users and television took 13 years to do this, social media sites added 100 million users in less than nine months. But social media is not a fad; it is a primary transfer in the way communication is taking place. While 24 of the 25 largest newspapers in the country are experiencing record declines in circulation, social media is expanding even as this paper is being read (Qualman 4). Social media is a timely issue, something that is continuing to grow, and a topic that is of utmost importance for people to be aware of because it is “empowering people to become the new influencers and forcing marketing and public relations professionals to include these powerful tools in their communication strategies” (Solis and Breakenridge xvii).

#### **Definition of Social Media**

Social media is content created by individuals or companies using readily available online publishing tools. As social media expert Ken Mueller writes, social media allows an everyday person to advance from simply part of the audience to one of the publishers, where they have the opportunity to broadcast their thoughts, opinions and expertise on a global scale (Mueller 3). Social media has become extremely popular

because it is a quick and easy way to connect with others in the online world to form personal and business relationships.

Because people so desire to feel accepted and included, a large amount of time is spent on connecting with others through social media tools. As Erik Qualman, author of the book *Socialnomics*, states: “As human beings, we have the dichotomous psychological need to be our own individual, yet we also want to feel that we belong to and are accepted by a much larger social set” (2). Thousands of pieces of social media content are published every day. According to Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Google, “There were five exabytes of information created between the dawn of civilization through 2003, but that much information is now created every two days, and the pace is increasing. People aren't ready for the technology revolution that's going to happen to them” (qtd. in Odden 4). Digital communication is emerging in ways faster than few people could have ever anticipated, and it is revolutionizing the way that business is done.

### **Social Media Effects on Personal Lives**

Hundreds of social media tools are available for business and personal use, 10 categories of which will be examined further. Before discussing how social media has revolutionized business, one must note how it has changed personal lives. Social media can actually make a person more productive and be a benefit to society: it causes people to participate in worthwhile activities, communicate more with others, and be efficient with their time and money.

Productive behavior is encouraged by offering a sense of competition for whoever participates in the most exciting activity. The person who updates a status with surfing

the web may feel guilty after seeing a friend's status saying going skydiving. Social media has turned into somewhat of a braggadocio platform, but according to Qualman, "Individuals constantly updating their social network status and micro-blogs are able to take real-time inventory of their lives and what they're doing throughout the day, rather than letting years go by and looking back on a wasted youth, saying 'what did I do with my life?'" (Qualman viii). On the other hand, people who see their friend's exciting statuses may feel a strong urge to want to really go do something worthwhile with their lives, or to ask if they can join their friends in whatever they are currently doing. It can also keep them from doing things that they would not want to show up on the Internet; what happens in Vegas might stay in Vegas but it might also get spread across YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Social media acts as a preventative measure in this way so that people will think more about the consequences of their actions before doing something they regret. Overall, the motivation to participate in worthwhile activities and to steer clear of actions that will result in negative consequences shows that social media is a good thing for society.

Social media also allows people to communicate with others more. Users are connecting with their loved ones like never before because social media provides a free, quick and easy way to keep in contact. This may be especially helpful for people to continue strong friendships with those who reside in different states or countries, or to build relationships with those they otherwise may not have. Since social media is such a fast and informal way to communicate, it has become the number one method of Internet contact, taking the place of even e-mail. As Qualman states, "Social media is the new inbox: Younger generations find e-mail antiquated and passé. They are much more

willing to connect with someone over Facebook than to randomly send them an email” (59). This is just another way that social media is revolutionizing personal lives.

By communicating with people over the Internet, people are also able to be more efficient with their time and money. Instead of thousands of people unnecessarily performing the same task, now only a few people need to research deals and test products and then others in the network can learn from those experiences. This saves so much time for individuals, and causes them to not waste their money on worthless items. In this way, social media is “creating the world’s largest referral program, because people care more about what their friends think than what Google thinks” (Qualman 242). Because of this, there is less reason to subscribe to expensive newspapers when customers are now able to receive free, more timely and trustworthy information from their friends through social media. This trend will only continue in the future.

This global broadcasting of thoughts, opinions and expertise from everyday people has been termed “user-generated content” has led to social media changing the way businesses are doing marketing and public relations.

### **Social Media Effects on Business**

Million-dollar television advertisements are no longer the main influence; rather, people’s referrals of products and services are. According to Qualman, while 78% of people trust peer recommendations, only 14% trust advertisements (147). Social media’s user generated content has flipped traditional marketing and public relations upside-down so that now what matters most is what the people are saying, not what the company is saying. This social media revolution can allow customers to see what their friends have found relevant, researched about, commented on or even purchased. Word of mouth has

always been valued, but social media pushes it even further by allowing people to search for what they are looking for. As Qualman states, “consumers are taking ownership of brands, and their referral power is priceless” (97). Having customers promote a company is quicker, cheaper, and better than broadcast commercials or print advertising will ever be. Therefore, smart companies will make the most of this switch in communication by celebrating when their products or services are shared with others via social media because not only is this type of marketing more reputable, it is also more cost-effective.

However, social media can prove to be a detriment for a business if negative things are said about them. Anyone can post anything on the Internet, and when someone personally knows that person, the sphere of influence those complaints have is greater. However, complaints directed through social media also allow companies to spend more time figuring out a solution to the problem than trying to find the problem itself. Businesses that can afford to pay for a specific position to monitor blogs are most likely to succeed with crisis intervention and customer service. “Good companies view negative feedback as an opportunity that they can act on and adjust their products and services accordingly,” states Qualman, “but bad companies view it as a nuisance or something they need to put an effort toward hiding” (241). But with social media, companies are unable to hide. Instead of once standing behind a massive marketing budget with a pushed message, companies now have to learn to listen and react to their customers’ needs in order to make their business strong.

A company can promote itself all it wants but this will mean nothing if people in the social media world are criticizing what is being done. As Solis states, “The future of brand equity isn’t about what you say about yourself, but what others say about you”

(Solis 5). On the other hand, if consumers are pleased with the company and share this with their connections through social media, this will be of great benefit to the company as it provides an even more valuable source of appreciation. This is why engaging consumers in the world of social media is so important, because it will cause them to remember that the company is interested in them and in providing relevant information that will actually help and reward them in the scheme of things.

Listening to consumers before marketing to them is not a new concept; it has been a part of the communications field for over a century. Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, arguably the two most influential early public relations professionals, developed these tactics that today are being used more than ever. Ivy Lee, the developer of the news release, argued that public relations is a “two-way street, that communications professionals are responsible for helping companies listen to the people who are important to them and communicate messages to them” (quoted in Solis and Breakenridge 23). Edward Bernays, the “father of public relations,” used his Uncle Sigmund Freud’s background in psychology and sociology to develop his own theories about the business world. Bernays “viewed PR as an applied social science influenced by psychology and sociology to scientifically manage and manipulate the thinking and behavior of the public” (qtd. in Solis and Breakenridge 24). When author Dale Carnegie wrote that the key to winning friends and influencing people is actually to listen, he could not have been any closer to the truth: the most effective marketing and public relations campaigns always begin with listening and observing. Businesses that begin by participating in networks simply as a user will be most successful when they go about

their business because they will effectively understand how to communicate with their consumer base.

In order to engage their customers, a company must first know their main consumer base and what the customers' wants and needs are. According to Brian Solis and Deidre Breakenridge, authors of the book *Putting the Public Back in Public Relations*, businesses must learn how to gather information through doing their homework and "investigating contacts' preferred forms of communication, their likes and dislikes and, most important, the topics they usually cover" (69). This is because the number one communication strategy of marketing and public relations in the era of social media is not about the tools but about the people. According to Solis and Breakenridge, since social media is social, there is certain research that needs to be done:

As in any social setting, you must observe and respect the community you want to join and contribute to...so that you can not only observe, appreciate, and understand how to immerse yourself in a community, but also intelligently participate in the ongoing conversations that matter. This is a shift from pitching to participating, from selling a story to telling a story. This is how you build relationships. (74)

Companies who begin with listening and gaining information on their customers will then know how to cultivate conversations instead of simply direct marketing. But only through integrating social media networking tools into influential channels will businesses be able to effectively reach the desired audience in a community-like manner. "Open, two-way conversations are much more effective than unilateral communications to your audience" (Qualman 87), and social media allows these two-way conversations to take place.

Cultivating conversations involves strategic communication goals being put into place so that companies can track themselves to make sure they are effectively fulfilling their organizational mission. Companies need to make a plan before they even begin using social media. There is one very important question: after a company attracts followers, what will they do with them? What is the best way to influence consumer behavior in order to affect the desired outcome, but to do this in a way that is attractive to them? Brands also need to consider the way that they will enter the customer “trust zone.” According to Solis, this comes from providing information and experiences or by going through another connected consumer. Trust leads to engagement, and engagement defines outcomes (Solis 7).

To engage their consumers, a company needs to take the time to respond individually to people instead of sending out a mass email via a list service. “Contacting people without caring or knowing about their interests and passions, or without knowing what you’re talking about or why it matters, should be the furthest thing from your mind,” Solis and Breakenridge explain to companies who desire to make their customers feel like part of a community (93).

Similar to Solis and Breakenridge, Qualman explains that marketing philosophies have shifted from an attitude of “it’s all about the message; we know what customers want and are doing them a service by selling what we know is best” to an attitude of “it’s all about the product; we never know what is perfect for our customers, so we constantly ask for advice and make adjustments according to them” (129). This is the type of philosophy that will cause people to become brand loyal and to spread the news about that certain company to their friends.

Communicating with influencers is exactly what cultivates the best marketing and public relations: unpaid, third-party endorsements from real customers. A good way to track who the biggest influencers in a certain industry are is to look at their Klout score. According to Lee Odden, Klout is a social media tool that tracks the amount of influence and credibility of social media users and shows how many people they reach (Odden 10). Purposefully building relationships with those influencers who are credible in the eyes of the public will not only increase a company's exposure, but will also build a positive image and reputation for that company. This is the art of marketing without marketing.

While the Internet will continue to transform how business is done, it would be wrong to say that traditional advertising is completely outdated. The best business comes from both traditional and Internet marketing working together. In print advertisements or television commercials, companies should give people a reason to visit their website or social networks to learn more about the company. As Solis and Breakenridge write, "The era of social media requires a fusion of traditional public relations, Internet marketing, web-savvy market intelligence, and the ability to listen and engage in conversations without speaking in messages" (35). By keeping these things in mind, a company can effectively use the Internet to further their business goals.

Since using social media is much more time and cost effective than traditional advertising, this should not pose a problem for most businesses. Companies that are worried about any initial expenses that may go into paying someone to update their social media networks should consider that marketing is not really an expense, but an investment. Companies that have success with social media marketing will view marketing as a chance to upgrade their company through an initial investment and not see

the cost as a problematic expense. They will also remember that only through listening to their audience and then building strategic communication objectives will they effectively reach the desired consumer base.

The old adage that you can only have two of these – cheap, quick or quality – does not have to stay true in the world of social media. It is absolutely possible to have all three, if companies take the time to not only understand but also efficiently use the tools and tactics of social media. Once companies understand the importance of the above-mentioned tactics, they must then learn what social media tools are available and which will best help accomplish their organizational goals. There are hundreds of social media tools and websites available, but there are 10 main categories of which to be aware.

### **Categories of Social Media Tools**

#### **Social Networking**

Social networking is probably the most popular category of social media tools, particularly Facebook. According to Hitwise statistics, Facebook is the number one most visited website, taking up 10 percent of all Internet visits. It is also by far the most widely consumer-used social media site (“Top 10 Websites” 1). With Facebook, users can create a profile, add other users as friends, exchange messages and receive automatic notifications with the latest updates. There are also common interest groups to network with others involved in various activities. Facebook reports that people spend a total of 500 billion minutes per month on Facebook. There are currently 750 million active users, with 150 million using Facebook mobile (“About Us” 1). According to Qualman, if Facebook were a country, it would be the world’s fourth largest (49).

**Micro Blogging**

Micro blogging, among which the popular social media tool Twitter falls, allows users to send out real-time updates to followers for a quick and easy read. Brevity is prioritized with this social media tool, and according to Solis, “the beauty of communicating through certain forms of micromedia is that your content is intentionally and forcibly truncated” (70). Companies must learn to do this in a way that is compelling and specific to their audience instead of writing a 700-word news release, focusing on a particular niche and not promoting multiple messages. Twitter is also an excellent way for a company to get opinions without having to censor them, since only what the user says is posted on their profile. Search tools can also be used to keep track of what is being said about a company or even an industry. There is no limit to the amount of followers allowed. Businesses should tweet about the “human” side of their company instead of constantly posting marketing updates. Followers should be kept interested and engaged in the brand by routine tweets, at least one a day. According to Twitter’s website, this social media tool originated as a mobile text service and now has reached one billion users (“About Us” 2).

**Professional Networking**

Professional networking is another large category of social media, with LinkedIn being an example of this. Professionals can create a profile online and increase their credibility by posting a resume and connecting with others via the Internet. Recommendations can be shared and users can be introduced to new contacts. Professionals can join many specific industry groups and post discussions. LinkedIn is the oldest of the four main social media sites – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and

LinkedIn. It was created in May 2003 and is still growing today since, according to its pressroom, a new member joins LinkedIn every second. Members of LinkedIn come from more than 200 countries from every continent, and all Fortune 500 executives have a LinkedIn profile (“About Us” 3).

### **Blogging**

Blogging has increasingly become a widely-used social media tool for both business and personal use, with over 77% of active Internet users regularly reading blogs (Social Media Optimization 5). The two most popular blogging platforms are Blogger and WordPress. It is important for companies to update blogs regularly and provide relevant posts about the industry itself. Blogs give companies the opportunity to be a resource for their community. Interaction with followers is also crucial in building relationships and attracting other readers; companies can use their blogs as a great way to listen to what their customers and the customers of their competitors are saying. According to Solis and Breakeyridge, “Blogger relations has less to do with the mechanics of publishing media and more to do with storytelling, an understanding of what you represent, why it matters to certain people, and a genuine intent for cultivating relationships” (192). If these things are done effectively, blogging can boost traffic for a website and increase search engine optimization so that the company website is more visible to viewers who utilize search engines to find certain topics of interest.

### **Video Marketing**

Video marketing is a more recent phenomenon for businesses as channels can be created to post videos clips on for people to view, follow and share with others. The biggest social media tool in this category is YouTube, created in 2005 and currently

being utilized as the second biggest search engine (Thomas 10). According to Solis and Breakenridge, “words can carry a company’s message only so far, but video is an opportunity to showcase the product while entertaining viewers” (18). When people like a video, they will pass it on via word of mouth marketing and sometimes a video will “go viral.” There has been much discussion on what exactly a “virability factor” is that allows it to get shared across the entire Internet, but it is often a video that is unique and has some sense of humor or emotional life connection to it. An example of a video that went viral and landed a sponsorship because of it is the “Dancing Matt” video, where a man travels around the world performing a unique dance with citizens of every culture. Stride Gum decided to sponsor Matt’s travel cost, and because the video as of August 2011 had received close to 38 million views, the company was paid back in millions of dollars of brand equity. This example is shared because of a quote from one of YouTube’s founders Jawed Karim who stated that this video “illustrates what YouTube is all about, namely that anyone who has a good idea can take that idea and make it happen” (Qualam 28). YouTube is constantly expanding; every one minute, 24 hours of footage is uploaded. This means that to watch everything, a person would have to live 1,000 years. YouTube currently uses the same amount of bandwidth as the entire Internet did in 2000 (“Top 10 Websites” 3). According to Nick Thomas of Forrester Research, Inc, “Video is pervasive, portable, and powerful. More than any other type of content, video is the perfect format for reaching consumers across devices, platforms, and demographics. It is a great tool for entertainment and for education, and users love it” (Thomas 13). Forrester discovered online video usage climbed profoundly in the last three years; while 41 percent of internet users regularly watched some kind of video in 2008, 60 percent do now (Thomas 17).

**Photo Sharing**

Photo sharing sites, similar to video marketing, allow personal users as well as businesses to post pictures of their choosing into various categories of different sites. Popular photo sharing sites include Flickr and Photo Bucket. Some sites allow other people – particularly bloggers or website owners – to download and use these pictures for free, whereas other sites have copyright information listed for their pictures which make usage of these photos illegal. Businesses can use these sites to their benefit by sharing images, demos and behind-the-scenes footage of what is going on inside their company (Thomas 18).

**Social Bookmarking**

Social bookmarking, an example of which is the site StumbleUpon, allows people who are in search of interesting websites to find good reads. This social media tool involves easier browsing features than others so that it brings more content to the users. Social bookmarking allows users to select options based on what they are interested in, and will then bring them relevant, lively content with a catchy title. If a company desires to promote their site through social bookmarking, they should be aware of features such as these that add more visibility to posts (Mueller 3).

**Review and Recommendation Sites**

Review and recommendation sites are social media tools that allow users who have experienced particular things – especially things related to travel such as hotels, airlines, or restaurants – to post a review about their experience. These users also have an opportunity to provide advice and recommendations to potential customers, who may or may not choose to pursue the same thing as the person who posted the review (Mueller

5). The company then has the opportunity to thank customers for positive comments and respond to negative ones. An example of this category of social media is TripAdvisor.

### **Discussion Forums**

Discussion forums were one of the first forms of social media created, but they still continue to remain effective today (Zolfaghari 7). These forums are often integrated into company websites, and when the companies take time to respond to people and to post interesting topics for discussion, there can be a significant amount of website traffic increase. Discussion forums are also part of social search engines, an example of which would be Yahoo! Answers, which allow everyday people to post questions and provide answers for other users. These questions can then be searched by others who are looking for a similar question or answer. Users can choose to create profiles for a discussion forum or simply make posts anonymously.

### **Social Media Releases**

Social media releases, the last main category of social media sites, are an extension of news releases. However, since news releases have been critiqued as being filled with too much jargon and self-serving quotes, the goal of the social media release is to offer real content that is easily understandable. According to Solis, social media releases usually are like a normal blog post but include a headline, news facts and embedded social content: “A social media release should contain everything necessary to share, discover and retell a story in a way that complements your original intent and context” (117).

### **Benefits of Social Media**

With so many social media tools available, a business may feel overwhelmed by wondering how they could have time to not only learn but also efficiently use everything. Therefore, a frequently asked question is which social media sites are most effective in business marketing. This question can be answered by looking at a 2009 study sponsored by the Social Media Success Summit, which analyzed almost 700 open-ended responses to determine how and why marketers are using social media to grow and promote their company. The study found that Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn and Facebook are the top four social media tools used by marketers (“Social Media” 3). Since these seem to be the current most effective social media tools, businesses should start by using these.

Another question often asked is what the benefits of social media marketing are. The Social Media Success Summit study also addressed this, finding that one of the benefits of social media marketing is that it reduces overall marketing costs (“Social Media” 3). Since what is currently most effective is to integrate traditional media with the Internet by directing viewers of print articles, magazine advertisements and television commercials to see more information online, companies can now spend less money on their previous traditional media and more on making the most of social media marketing.

A second huge benefit is that social media generates exposure for businesses (“Social Media” 4). As was mentioned previously, if something has the “virability factor” it will be passed on to other users through word of mouth marketing online. Since people are most interested in what their friends have to say about something, a friend’s review of a company can go a long way in helping to generate exposure for that business. Other

benefits of using social media for business are higher search rankings, more leads, and even new partnerships or business deals (“Social Media” 4).

### **Writing for Social Media**

Not only is it important to know which social media tools to use, but also how to use them. Companies cannot forget about relevancy in the publishing of their social media content. Just because a company gets someone to “like” their page does not mean that they automatically have that person’s attention forevermore. It is their responsibility to continue feeding people relevant information in a similar way to what they hooked those people with, or else it is inevitable that the people will turn their attention to a different company. Because of this, brands must find a way to promote themselves consistently and over a period of time, not just through one large campaign that eventually fizzles out and then there is nothing to back it up with afterwards. Companies must deliver things of value to their customers, not just once but continually throughout time. Efficient social media involves building an ongoing relationship with the consumer, with “ongoing” being the key word.

A 2011 study by ExactTarget and CoTweet discovered that over 90 percent of consumers have “broken up” with at least one company’s social media tool (Facebook, Twitter, etc) because of either irrelevant, too frequent or boring posts (“New Research” 4). This shows that companies must find a balance in posting their marketing messages and must always make sure that they are relevant and interesting for the target audience. Otherwise, companies will lose fans online and possibly in the marketplace too.

The study identified 1500 consumers who were changing their online behaviors according to a few top reasons for disliking the latest company strategies. “Consumers

remain willing to engage with marketers via the inbox, Facebook and Twitter” (“New Research” 4), said the principal of ExactTarget’s Marketing Research and Education Group, “however, consumers understand now more than ever that they are in control of marketers’ messages and will punish irrelevant, voluminous or boring messages by cutting off marketers means of direct communication” (“New Research” 5). This shows that relevancy is a very important part of social media.

When writing for social media, businesses must not only keep their target audience in mind for relevancy purposes, but also so the company can learn how to effectively cut through the noise to reach them. According to the Liberty University Career Center, this can be done by doing three things: being “professional,” “practical” and “personal” (“Writing Effectively” 3).

Being “professional” means that a business must be careful in the words used for social media as it is a representation of their brand and reputation. “As with all communication efforts, professionalism separates the amateurs from the authorities,” the blog states (“Writing Effectively” 5). This means that if a representative is communicating for a company, they must be clearly upfront about who they are working for and keep in mind that in all social media communications, the organization is at stake. Transparency is important because when a company representative tries to hide behind anonymous names and profiles, it negates their credibility. Thought goes into presenting quality social media communication that considers the long-term results; quick comments can and will get people in hot water because they reach audiences instantly and can still be discovered even after being removed. On the other hand, if communication is done with honesty and integrity, people will be more likely to trust the business and know that

it is authentic. Truth matters: “If you’re known as a reliable and reputable source, you won’t be lacking in followers” (“Writing Effectively” 6). Social media in itself holds the power to make a company either look great or look weak to the outside world, and this means that the company representative must go about presenting things in a professional, respectful and respectable manner.

Being “practical” means that a business must use common sense in their social media communications; the company must consider their overall communication strategies. This is done by not only setting strategic goals and objectives, but also consistently reevaluating them to make sure what is being written is effectively fulfilling the company mission (“Writing Effectively” 8). Again, this involves considering the target market and then choosing the best way to reach them. Content needs to be of high quality in order for it to be meaningful, and a company must take into consideration the overall brand image they want their business to project. Also, search engine optimization needs to be considered in order for content to be discovered. This can be done through paid or natural search engine optimization. Natural search engine optimization includes such tactics as using specific keywords on the site, and updating content frequently.

Being “personal” means that a business must find a way to connect with their readers on a relational level so that they feel like there is more of an ongoing conversation than a direct marketing attempt. No one wants to follow someone who is boring. “Write in the voice of a real person,” the Career Center blog states, “Social media carries with it a level of intimacy that requires you to demonstrate personality and express a distinct point of view...add a few personal preferences in there to help build relationships” (“Writing Effectively” 12). Like was emphasized earlier, a business must

consider who their target market is and what their current views are before knowing how to effectively interact with them. The company must think of what people want to hear, not what the company wants to say: “Provide substance, avoid aggressive self-promotion, and do all you can to foster interaction” (“Writing Effectively” 13). If a business is not being relevant and conversational in what they are saying, no one will want to listen. This is most definitely a difficult technique to achieve, but the businesses that do learn it will have a huge advantage over others in their field.

While technology of the past may have been to get as many fans, friends and followers as possible, the social media of today is about cultivating relationships and engaging in genuine conversation with the people who believe another is producing worthwhile content. Solis adds to this by saying that, “Social media is less about the technology and more about the sociology. It’s the idea of real people connected to real people” (8). This is not an era of robots on computers trying to reach a certain number of followers. This is an era of real people who desire to build real relationships in a very fast-paced world. Everything in social media is real-time now and businesses have to compete for relevance in a world that is constantly being inundated with information. Cutting through the noise is a challenge but this is the only way for a business to be effective in its social media approach. It is all a competition for the here-and-now, providing the best information the quickest, and that is what people are looking for. If a company’s followers know that the business’s social media tools will offer the latest up-to-date information, that is where they will go first and they will continue to be driven back there.

Like the previously mentioned ways of how to write for social media, Solis has gone even further by saying that businesses can no longer afford to simply promote their brand but need to instead find a way to actually engage their consumers to want to learn more (Solis 9). The organization must find a way to get its message out not only in an informative way, but also in a way that attracts customers to learn more because they are being fed things of true value. Solis believes that this comes from using the “Five I’s of social marketing” which are “influence,” “interaction,” “ideation,” “insight” and “intelligence” (Solis 10).

“Influence” comes from providing noteworthy information that will cause a consumer to want to do what is being asked of them, which could be anything from responding to a survey to actually going to the store and purchasing a product. In the same way, the consumer can become an influencer themselves by passing on the information to a friend and asking them to participate in the behavior as well. According to Solis, the key to being influential is to provide content that is valuable to the consumer so that they will truly want to do what is being asked of them and then will also find it worthy of being passed on to their followers (14).

“Interaction,” following its name, involves integrating information into the stream of social media that a customer is likely to read and respond to. This must be something that cuts through the clutter of everything else that is constantly pushed at consumers. An effective company will look at what is being done by their competitors and then find a way to do something similar yet different by conducting an interactive interface that gets the message across. A company should desire to bring their mission to life instead of just trying to tell people what it is. If a company wants to garner interaction, Social Fresh – a

social media education company – believes that 80% of all social media posts should give value to the fans first, whereas only 20% should be promotional or brand-first. They also say that posting like a friend instead of a brand will allow followers to not think the company is bombarding them with information overload or words they don't understand, and this will instead cause them to want to interact (Keath 6). The best way to build interaction with social media is to use every category of status updates: text, links, images and video. When there is a variety of content published regularly, people will be more eager to read – and engage with – the content. Another excellent way to build interaction is to encourage social media followers to submit content of their own and comment on other people's content. A company can excite people to do this by replying to fans when they comment on the company's social media post. Also, companies could consider experimenting with various publishing times like morning, lunch, evening and weekends since they have a better chance of gaining interaction when most of their followers are not at work.

“Ideation” is the process of brainstorming, creating and communicating new ideas. According to Solis, “ideation is all stages of a thought cycle, from innovation, to development, to actualization” (192). This involves being purposeful to coming up with new creative tactics to approach the target audience. Or, on the other hand, a company can choose to use the target audience to help them through the process of ideation. This is becoming a more popular approach with many companies as it allows customers to feel involved. With the use of a discussion forum on their website, the company is able to track what is being said about them, read the new ideas that their consumers are developing, and pick and choose which ones they want to develop into a further process.

The discussion forum approach is especially rewarding for both parties since it allows the customer to be involved just enough to provide them satisfaction of being a part of something greater than themselves, and it gives the company a grander idea base without overwhelming them or making them feel that they must develop every single idea that is posted on the forum. It causes them to find out what they need to change to create a better experience for the customer, but then allows them to consider what actually makes sense on the business side of things as well. This is really a win-win approach for both the company and its consumer base, and is currently the fastest growing “T” when it comes to social media marketing.

“Insight” is similar to ideation in that it allows customers to write to the company regarding their thoughts on what is going on with the actions, beliefs and behaviors of the company. Most businesses currently promote utilizing Facebook and Twitter to contact the company, but as was discussed earlier, there are a variety of options that a customer can choose from to get a hold of the company’s attention. As Solis states, insight also includes the company’s side of looking at what they are currently doing and how effective it is being, as well as what they might be able to do better or get rid of to become even more effective in the social media world (Solis 16). Through this, companies are often able to identify gaps in their social media behaviors to allow for a better online marketing plan. Insight really involves a combination of all the “T’s” previously discussed.

“Intelligence” means producing social media material that holds value among the target audience, material that generates interest but also has educational understanding behind it. According to Solis, if a company is producing material simply to get it out

there without considering what they are actually publishing, this will be blatantly obvious to the public (18). On the other hand, if the company takes time to think about what they are writing and posting social media material that reaches their audience in an intelligent manner, this will be rewarding for all parties involved in the process. However, this is not an easy task – research must be done beforehand in order to produce social media that is intelligent.

The fact is that a company's audience has an audience who has an audience, and the list goes on from there. Marketers need to consider this when they produce their social media content since they are responsible not just for meeting the needs of their direct audience but really anyone that the information might come in contact with – which could be a lot of people. Often a company targets the influencers of the industry and those people feel a responsibility to pass along content to the people that connect with them, so it is of high importance for a company to consider the “five I’s” when writing material. The most effective social media marketing will always include “influence,” “interaction,” “ideation,” “insight” and “intelligence” in its approach of content.

### **Social Media and Search Engine Optimization**

The most recent change in social media has been customizing it for search engine optimization, the writing of content to catch the eye of Google and other search engines and cause them to rank the company's content as high as possible on their search engine pages. When a consumer searches for something, they want to see instant results. The chance that they will click onto page two of search results is low, and so businesses strive to have their content on page one. But businesses are not just stopping there. Companies

now want to be number one on the list. The advantages of this are very high, so much so that a report done by Mashable, a social media news website, found that 71 percent of marketers said they would strive harder in the future to increase the search engine optimization of their content to become number one on the list (Odden 8). While search engine optimization is often used for the company website itself, social media is continually having a larger part in achieving search engine optimization.

Social media posts should be search engine optimized for many reasons, an obvious reason being that a company wants their posts to be seen. Now that social media has been integrated into Google, the posts that have been search engine optimized will be much more likely to show up when a person types in a keyword. Social content that cannot be found when a person is looking for it is a lost opportunity that is not worth a company's time. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for businesses to learn and use search engine optimization strategies.

Search engine optimization strategies begin with research. The most popular keywords being searched that relate to the industry must be found, and this can be done by utilizing various tools online. Once keywords are identified, the company must learn how to effectively integrate them into written content. Social media posts must include these keywords, but a special technique must be developed so that the content is still just as appealing to the consumer. Also, social media posts should include links back to the company website, but again this needs to be done in such a way that it still provides value for the consumer. According to Mashable, only about 2-7 percent of all content should be a keyword or link (qtd. in Odden 10). When companies overload their content with

keywords and links – a behavior which has been termed “link farming” – people realize this and are likely to find the information of no worth at all.

Another way for a company to gain better search engine optimization is to be referenced and linked by other websites and blogs that have powerful standings in their particular industry. In fact, this is what counts the most for search engine optimization. Social media has a big part to play in this because blogs are most often where companies link to others. The more a business interacts with their followers – and with other companies that are similar to them – the more likely they are to have their work referenced and linked by other sites, and in turn gain higher search engine optimization for the company. Everything in social media seems to lead back to engaging followers, providing relevant content, and developing interaction.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, social media has and is continuing to revolutionize the way that both individuals and companies are going about their everyday lives. People are becoming more productive, money and time efficient as part of a competition within networks and a communication between peers. Businesses are learning that traditional advertising is not the key to reach an audience effectively but rather through listening and participating in two-way conversations. It is important to understand these current techniques and the direction in which social media is heading because it is greatly affecting many facets of the world today. As the Chief Insights Officer of Young and Rubicam commented, “Social media is creating something that I think eventually is going to be very healthy for our economy” (qtd. in Gerzema 4). Social media is only going to continue its upward trend of revolutionizing the world of business, and those who choose

to learn about it now will likely be among the most successful. Students especially have a huge advantage in learning these social media tools and techniques now so that they can be most effective in their business lives in the future.

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